Long way up

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Long Way Up: Powered Two-Wheeled Journeys in Northern Peripheries

Introduction

The opening of the continental Arctic for tourism has been largely facilitated by the extensive road building programs of the twentieth century. Whilst primarily aimed at the economic development and resource exploitation of these peripheral regions, the visitor economy has followed the branches of this network, and in many Arctic areas tourism is now a significant driver of development. The flexibility afforded by drive tourism in places that have traditionally been relatively inaccessible by public transport has particularly favoured the development of this sector. Drive tourism in general has received some scrutiny (for example Prideaux and Carson, 2011) as part of 'the recognition that growing numbers of people desire a free and independent travel experience' (Shih, 2006:1029). Further, this freedom means that drive tourism is influential in the regional dispersal of tourism and is therefore particularly important for peripheral destinations. A specific subsector that has seen notable growth is that of motorcycle tourists, which have found the open and dramatic spaces of the continental Arctic a powerful attraction.

Motorcycling may be seen as a both a peripheral and a core activity. It is doubly peripheral in having a distinct and well documented sub-culture (Pinch and Reimer, 2012), with, in addition, clear liminal aspects related to the affiliated need to escape - hence the particular attraction of peripheral journeys. Yet it is also core in terms of a significant growing mainstream, the

embodied nature of experiences, and the trend of destinations increasingly fulfilling the various needs of motorcyclists, most of whom originate from more populous areas. This chapter examines the experiential facets of the sector by looking at the characteristics of this activity in Arctic regions, with a focus on Northern Norway. Whilst these regions have been historically peripheral, they are now accessible to all manner of drive tourists and therefore perhaps deserve the label of 'near periphery'. Indeed commentators on the Arctic Highway of Norway (the main trunk route in the region, designated the E6) have noted that 'no other continuous highway so penetrates the Arctic and reaches so near to the pole' (Douglas 1972:11). The arbitrary 'end' (for there are multiple branches and termini along its length) of this route is found at North Cape, which constitutes the final destination of many motorcycling tourists undertaking this journey (itself on a branch route, the E69). Insights are provided from a research visit in June 2015 following the seminar where many of the chapters of this book were developed. In addition to observations of motorcycle tourists and tourism businesses, discussions were held with riders, tourism officers and destination organisation managers in the region. To this is added significant internet coverage of both individual and organised trips to North Cape by motorcycle in order to provide a range of findings regarding motorcycle tourism behaviour, motivations and management issues.

Motorcycling as core

Whilst motorcycles are clearly a method of transport, their use in supporting leisure activity has a long history (Healey, 2011). Motorcycle numbers have increased in recent years as a reflection of this popularity. For example, the 1.4 million currently licensed motorcycles in the UK is more than double the numbers licensed in the mid-1990s, whilst cars have proportionally seen a much smaller increase over the same period. There has also been a shift to larger capacity

motorcycles and an increase in the average age of motorcyclists, with half of all active motorcyclists now aged 40 or over (DfT, 2009).The causes of this aging trend are complex, but include, on one hand, nostalgia for motorcycle travel and increased disposable incomes for older age cohorts, and the barriers of increases in license costs and insurance premiums for younger riders. The aging demographics of this group have meant that, increasingly, motorcycles are used for leisure purposes rather than commuting. Motorcycling differs from the major forms of powered vehicular tourism in that the driving of the vehicle is a major part of the attraction. Whilst many other forms of travel value the journey as much as the destination, touring by motorcycle is an immersive experience the intensity of which is shared perhaps only by certain forms of off-road (Carson & Taylor, 2008) or classic/sports car motoring, as well as some forms of non-powered transport.

There are, subsequently, discernible links between the motorcycling sector and the adventure tourism sector. Both, for example, share an attraction of perceived risk. Visit Wales defines the adventure activity sector as 'activities that are focused upon engaging with the natural environment in a physically and mentally challenging manner, where skill acquisition and an element of risk management are central to the experience' (Visit Wales, 2011). On-road motorcycling's engagement with the natural environment is based largely on the scenic qualities of the landscape through which the participant travels, and a much higher feeling of immersion in that landscape which ensues due to the lack of a rigid frame around one's body. The engagement with the environment for a motorcyclist is skills-based, has a high degree of physical and mental challenge and relies on constant risk assessment. This leads to a feeling of 'flow' identified by a number of authors as being important in active tourism pursuits (see for example Cater, 2006a, Buckley, 2012). In this sense, then, motorcyclists are adventure seekers, and it may be appropriate for marketing organisations to cross-target this sector.

The motorcycle tourism sector is economically significant. In the UK the MCIA estimated that motorcycle-related tourism expenditure in the UK is around £569 million, supporting approximately 13,250 tourism jobs (MCIA, 2010). Many peripheral locations around the world benefit disproportionately from the influx of these visitors. For example, despite being a much smaller economy, the author estimated the direct contribution of motorcycle tourism to Wales as being over £70 million in 2011 (Cater, 2012). Several factors serve to increase the impact of motorcycle tourists in relation to other road-based visitors. First, motorcyclists are less able to carry all of the goods and services that they might need on the motorcycle, and will therefore purchase more in the destination itself or along the way. In addition, travelling by motorcycle is a physically demanding activity and therefore requires more frequent stops, which is also required due to smaller fuel tanks.

Despite their popularity, there has also been a longstanding association of motorcycles with a subculture that is alternative to the mainstream. The lack of interest in the motorcycle tourism sector may be due to a perceived image of rebellious bikers which is at odds with their current demographic. Rather, today motorcycling is a growing leisure sector targeted at affluent, well-educated and older individuals. Much like aesthetes of centuries before, motorcyclists often seek out the sublime natural landscapes of peripheral regions. As Botterill et al. note, peripheral areas are 'often noted for the beauty of their landscapes and seascapes, which may be expressed in a very dramatic way' (2000: 10). Furthermore, coastal and mountain areas are endowed with the sinuous roads that motorcyclists favour over featureless and tiring highways.

Types of motorcycle tourism

In an early project to promote motorcycle tourism to the region, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (2006) identified four major groups of tourists travelling by motorcycle: independent

travellers; clubs that organise tours and rallies; specialist motorcycle tour operators; and bikers attending events. The latter are significant, with events such as the Isle of Man TT races being one of the major attractions to that destination, drawing upwards of 60,000 (compared with a resident population of 85,000) and contributing over £50 million to the islands' economy. There is a typology of bikers which may be broadly demarcated as sports bikers (newer and faster bikes), cruisers (more comfortable touring bikes), classic bikers (vintage and heritage models) and trail bikers (off road motorcyclists). In recent years there has been significant growth in the so called AdventureSport market. These bikes are similar in style to off-road motorcycles but are predominantly designed for and capable of on-road use. Often they will have features similar to machines traditionally included in the Touring category, for example fairings, luggage carrying capacity and increased comfort (MCIA, 2010).

There have been efforts by stakeholders in peripheral destinations to harness the potential of the motorcycle tourism market. The Motorcycle Scotland project has aimed to promote the rural region of Dumfries & Galloway as a motorcycle touring destination, and received £23,000 of European Union LEADER funding. The vehicle for this project is the development and marketing of a route-based website at www.motorcyclescotland.com. This lists biker-friendly businesses in southern Scotland and aims to increase the value of motorcycle tourism to the region, targeting UK and international bikers. There is also advice on green biking and links to carbon offsetting schemes. They also aim to (a) increase the benefits to motorcyclists through discounts and signposting of biker facilities, (b) make the website sustainable and raise additional income for its further development, including implementation of an E-newsletter, (c) attract both UK and international visitors by targeting ferry companies and motorcycle clubs and specialist travel agents, and (d) increase the number of motorcycle tourists staying overnight at biker-friendly accommodation and spending money in the region (Motorcycle Scotland).

The long distance motorcycle market

Although long distance motorcycle trips are not new (Hall, 2013), they have certainly become more visible. In 2004 the documentary 'Long Way Round' with actors Ewan McGregor and Charlie Borman popularised the extreme long distance motorcycle tour. The documentary followed the exploits of the pair as they attempted to ride west to east around the northern hemisphere from London to New York across the Eurasian and North American land mass. Much of the ride took place in remote areas of Siberia, and along the infamous 'road of bones' built by Stalin. Although hard to prove directly, the series was probably responsible for increasing numbers of adventure motorcyclists generally, as well as huge sales growth for BMW, the manufacturer of the bikes used in the trip. In the UK, BMW sold over 10,000 of the model used in the program between 2004 and 2014, and the bike continues to be one of the most popular in the country.

In a recent survey undertaken in Wales, almost half of all leisure motorcyclists had undertaken an overseas trip by motorcycle (Cater, 2012). Examples of popular long distance trips include those to the Arctic Circle in Alaska, often as an endpoint of a Pan-American Highway trip, or crossing Australia, particularly the open desert of the Nullarbor Plain. There are a growing number of dedicated tour operators catering to this increased demand, for example GlobeBusters which was founded in 2002 by Kevin and Julia Sanders when they set a new world record for circumnavigating the world by motorcycle in just 19½ days. This was followed in 2003 by a second world record for riding from Alaska across North, Central and South America to the south of Argentina in 35 days. This 'Trans Americas' route was then repeated in 2005 as their first motorcycle tour, taking a 'more leisurely' 19 weeks. A successful business has since been built around organising and delivering tours to many destinations

across the world, including Africa, Asia, and the Americas. It has achieved significant growth and has a current turnover of £500,000. It employs three full-time staff at its base in South Wales and another six freelance and support riders and staff to help deliver the tours as required. GlobeBusters delivers a range of tours involving different locations and durations, from ten days to 20 weeks, and typically accommodates groups of between eight and 18 riders. These substantial trips are usually booked a year or two in advance, can cost up to £20,000 per rider, and current levels of demand project significant future growth. Initial expectations that these are likely to be 'once in a lifetime' trips appear to have underestimated demand as repeat business is strong and over one-quarter of customers have already toured with the company.

Tourism at the North Cape

A popular long-distance motorcycle destination in Europe is North Cape (or Nordkapp) of Norway, the highest latitude of the continent (figure 1). Strictly speaking the site celebrated as North Cape is neither the furthest north (there is a small promontory slightly further east known as Knivskjelodden), nor part of the mainland (it being part of the island Magerøya in Finnmark province). However, being situated on a spectacular 300 metre cliff looking out over the Barents Sea, combined with easy access to the site, has meant that North Cape has been a popular tourist destination since the 1870s, with Thomas Cook pioneering tours there as long ago as 1875. Consequently the site has also attracted a significant amount of academic interest (for example Jacobsen, 1997, 2000, 2015). Indeed, North Cape is perhaps in contrast to most Arctic tourism sites, where tourism numbers are relatively low, as here 'road access has enabled hundreds of thousands of tourists to access the end of the world' (Lemelin and Johnston, 2008:32), creating at times a semblance of "mass tourism".

Figure 1: Motorcyclist with BMW GS at the North Cape/ Nordkapp (Miquel Silvestre)

Numbers of motorcycling tourists are dwarfed by the numerous cruise ship visitors. These dock in Honningsvåg as part of a tour of Northern Norway, and are transported by tour buses to North Cape itself, often for the peak midnight period. Viewing the midnight sun above the horizon is a highlight of a visit in the summer months, visible as a complete disc between 14th May and 30th July (Douglas, 1972). A significant number of camper vans and drive tourists also visit the site, although tourism there is still highly seasonal, with a focus on the two- or three-month summer period, for as noted by Botterill et al., 'weather restrictions are often a feature of European peripheral areas' (2000: 11). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the weather at North Cape is remarkably mild for its location, owing to the influence of the North Atlantic Drift, or Gulf Stream. Being above 71 degrees north, the site is equivalent to central Greenland or the North Slope of Alaska, yet does not have the temperature extremes of these

locations, remaining free of sea ice year round. This relatively high degree of seasonality means that the fishing industry is still the most significant economic sector in the province, but there has also been recent growth in winter tourism to the region, associated in particular with viewing the northern lights (*aurora borealis*). Winter visits to the site are facilitated by scheduled convoys leaving Honningsvåg, led by snow ploughs.

Tourism to Northern Norway has developed significantly in recent decades, moving on from a situation of 'unrealised potential' described by observers in the 1970s (Douglas, 1972). Today a large multi-level visitor centre at North Cape, built in 1988, with a cinema, restaurants and souvenir shops hosts over 200,000 visitors annually. The development of the site has long been a contentious issue, with visitors as far back as the 1970s in awe of the landscape being 'less impressed by the commercialism of the North Cape Hall' (Douglas, 1972:189). These sentiments have continued, particularly for motor-based tourists, with one-third of foreign motorists at the turn of the century considering North Cape to be too commercialised (Jacobsen, 2000). Other commentators have noted the attempts by management to harness the dramatism of the site, rather falsely 'unveiling' the midnight sun from behind curtains to music in the glass fronted hall (Jensen, Pers. Comm. 2011). The authenticity of the site as an unblemished natural phenomenon is further problematised by a display commemorating the large numbers of Thai visitors following the visit of Thailand's King Chulalongkorn in 1907. Indeed, Jacobsen has noted that there is an overreliance on the site as a 'monumental and romantic destination' rather than as a 'representation of the northern edge of the European world and a place one should see, (which) is the main potential for bringing new motorists to the Cape' (2000:88).

Peripheral Motorcyclist Motivations and Behaviour

Although the majority of motorcyclists visiting North Cape are travelling independently, there are several specialist tour operators who do cater for this market. These tours are generally around two weeks in duration, starting and finishing in Oslo, although some one-way tours are also available. North Cape is used in the marketing of these trips as the ultimate goal, and the site features strongly in the promotional imagery. There is some variation in the services and pricing of these tours, often depending on whether the client wishes to hire a motorcycle. Examples include £2000 for a 16 day tour on the customer's own motorcycle (World motorcycle tours), €5000 including motorcycle hire (Edelweissbike) or $10,000 including hire and only one way (Ayres adventures). Many of these firms offer North Cape trips alongside other long distance journeys, although it is perhaps notable that the relative ease of access does limit the opportunities for these companies to offer viable packages to a market that is usually more independent.

North Cape motorcyclists that the author spoke to expressed a range of different motivations for visiting the site. Perhaps surprisingly, visitors had a wide variety of experience, with this being either the first major long distance trip or one of many. Age and experience do not necessarily correspond, as the author met two 'born again' bikers in their 60s who had not previously completed a long distance trip. Although the site is remote, the relative ease of access compared to other long-distance destinations does attract relative novices. Nevertheless, motorcyclists do still approach the trip as an adventurous one, with the manager of the Honningsvåg tourism office suggesting that this sector approached their trip as an expedition, with a significant amount of prior planning involved (pers. comm. June, 2015).

As North Cape is often 'the end of their pilgrimage' (Jacobsen 2015:130), there is a perceived demarcation of the site as the end of the road and end of a continent, with motorcyclists wanting to "go to the end of the world - as I've never been there before" (Swiss motorcyclist, pers. Comm. June 2015). As with other tourists they visited North Cape because they wanted to

experience the end of the earth which the site represents, an imaginary described well in Hererro and Roseman's recent collection highlighting the attraction of places known literally or figuratively as 'Finis-terre' (2015). However, it is not only the goal of North Cape that features in the motivations of motorcyclists, with the journey being equally significant. Two-wheeled visitors felt that long distance motorcycling gave them a deep 'impression of nature' as well as being able to 'have fun with driving', echoing the immersive nature of the experience alluded to above.

A very dynamic weather situation at North Cape does create challenges for visitors, particularly if they do not intend spending a significant amount of time at the site, and may preclude the expected view of the midnight sun, as this motorcyclist described;

"I've seen a very thick fog in front of me. That was really disappointing. I've arrived to the entry toll both, where you need to pay to enter the Nordkapp area (go for a cheaper ticket, still quite expensive by international standards) – and just as I passed the toll booths the fog cleared and it was sunny again – I could see the Nordkapp right in front of me! Its amazing feeling as I parked my bike and walked to the famous globe, had a walk around – the views are great, but it's more the feeling of achievement that was sooo great! (Rideinwild, 2014)

Motorcyclists visiting North Cape tend to follow a route which will take in the Fjords of the western coast of Norway on either the outward or return journey, and use a quicker (albeit less scenic) route through Finland or Sweden for the other leg. There are a wide variety of age ranges; on the day the author visited I spoke to a pair of German men in their 60s on a five-week trip on classic motorcycles, a Swiss couple in their 40s, taking a two-week trip on new BMW GS motorcycles, and a student travelling alone. Indeed, the dominance of the BMW GS series as the motorbike of choice described above was noted by the manager of the Honningsvåg tourism office, and indeed the place is promoted by BMW themselves (figure 2).

Generally the motorcyclists expressed high levels of satisfaction with their trip, although there were some complaints regarding the availability and service provided by restaurants in the region, particularly in Sweden, where there were both limited numbers of outlets and tendencies to close too early. Nevertheless the condition of the roads was felt to be very good. Motorcyclists may require specialist mechanical help on such a lengthy journey and specialist service centres in the Norwegian towns of Alta and Laksalev can provide these facilities.

Figure 2: BMW advertisement using North Cape (BMW Motorrad Italia/ Garrigosa Studio)

Motorcyclists use a variety of accommodation, with observation and discussion illustrating that camping, hiring of huts and staying in hotels are all popular. Jacobsen (2015) estimates that there are 16 enterprises offering tourist accommodation in the area though none of them specifically target motorcyclists. Other regions have developed “bikers welcome” schemes to encourage the development of motorcycle-friendly accommodation, and this could be

developed in Finnmark. Many motorcyclists would like to camp at North Cape itself, given its importance as the final destination of the journey. Although the authorities do tolerate some informal camping, there are currently no facilities for overnight visitors. Another practice that the author observed was the desire to take the motorbike itself to the North Cape sculpture, a large globe located in the main pedestrian area of the complex at the top of the cliff (figure 2). Whilst difficult due to the large crowds, this once again illustrates the strong bonds that motorcyclists have with their vehicle, with the visit being an achievement of both person and machine, each being figuratively an extension of the other.

Figure 3: Motorcyclists at the North Cape Globe Sculpture (Helen Strong)

Motorcycle Safety and Sustainability

One particular issue on the roads of northern Norway is posed when encountering the numerous herds of reindeer in the region. Advice given to motorists is to note if the herd is split on either

side of the road, this being a more dangerous situation as the herd will attempt to come together when a vehicle approaches. The generally desolate character of the region and lack of vehicles relative to the home regions of the tourists may compound this problem, as noted by a motorcyclist:

*"But even on these desolate roads I managed to nearly hit a suicidal reindeer which bolted from nearby trees straight into my path. I cleared it by about an inch" (*Jones, 2007*).*

Whilst motorcyclists expect to be faced with the wild weather characteristic of the Arctic as described above, they are perhaps not fully prepared for the ferocity or variability of the climate, a point emphasised in informal discussions with the manager of the Honningsvåg tourism office. Visiting North Cape by motorcycle is not really feasible before the middle of May, but even then conditions can pose a challenge. This may prove a problem for motorcyclists wanting to experience some degree of solitude and avoid the peak summer season in July. In May 2015, a lone motorcyclist had to be rescued after an accident on the main road when there was still too much snow. Indeed, motorcyclist descriptions of their experience highlight the challenging nature of the riding, the trip to North Cape being:

one of the most frightening I can remember in 27 years of riding! Twenty degrees of lean in the wrong direction around most bends and each time we came from the lee of a mountain the wind would hit from a different direction. To make matters worse, within ten miles the cloud dropped and not only could we not point the bikes in the right direction but we couldn't see in which direction they needed pointing! (Hawksley, 1996)

Of course the challenge of riding in the conditions experienced in these peripheral areas is to some degree part of the attraction, and undeniably part of the narrative capital gained by engaging in the experience. Nevertheless, the local tourism and transport departments are aware of the threats to motorcyclists in particular and are keen to provide advice to "respect

the weather" and to "keep upright". However, authorities need to take particular care in the advice provided to visitors from more southerly countries, especially regarding road conditions. The author, for example, discovered that a road marked as a trunk scenic route on a tourist map was in poor condition and blocked by snow in June. There is thus the opportunity to provide some motorcycle-specific advice regarding driving hazards and road conditions and routes, such as that provided in Wales by the 'Wales by bike' website.

Further popularity of the site with motorcyclists may pose a challenge to future sustainability of the attraction. Jacobsen (2015) documents how, since the road to North Cape was finally completed in 1956, the goal, accentuated by guidebooks, has become increasingly a 'race to the cape', with surrounding areas much less visited. As noted by one motorcycle visitor;

Then on the seventh day we rode the long stretch to the North Cape. This was the coldest part of the trip, with gale-force winds from the Arctic Ocean. But soon we were there. At 71 degrees latitude we were at the most northerly point in Europe, which felt great. But we didn't stay too long because we still had over 2500 miles to ride on our return journey. (Jones, 2007)

In fact North Cape, like many other pilgrimage destinations has always suffered from a bucket list mentality, with one of the earliest visitors, the priest Francesco Negri in 1664 claiming 'having made it here, my curiosity is satisfied' (cited in Jacobsen, 2015). This highlights one of the enduring problems of peripheral pilgrimages which are often associated with a wilderness goal. Stonehouse and Crosbie (1995) illustrate how tourist motivations to visit the Antarctic Peninsula and to tread 'where no human has done so before' are inherently unsustainable. "Alternatively, there is opportunity for destination management organisations to develop peripheral tourism with an eye towards encouraging visitors to experience the unique features of the landscape and people of the north along the journey, as well as at the end goal. Indeed, Cater (2012) has noted the very significant social motivations of motorcycle

tourists, who favour being able to stop at locations along the way with other motorcyclists to experience both the places and peoples they are riding through as well as sharing their adventures with each other.

Conclusion

There is undeniably a high degree of place-making that has created the site at North Cape, from both motorcycle and other visitors. As Maher has noted, the Arctic has been inundated by a plethora of media interest in recent years (2015). A significant amount of online blog posts and travel narratives from motorcyclists and tour operators, some of which have been used in this chapter, reinforce the myth of North Cape as a journey to conquer. Cater (2006b) has shown how the growth of adventure tourism in New Zealand similarly benefitted from its identity as both *near* (to western standards of safety) and *far* (being a location also at the end of the world). The danger is that other meanings of peripheral areas become lost, for 'the growth of tourism in locations that have historically been considered geographically remote plays a major role in the consolidation and transformation of often longstanding and powerful cultural imaginaries about 'the edges of the world'' (Herrero and Roseman, 2015:1). These are but one further example of the manner in which tourism distorts traditional models of core and periphery (Saarinen, 2015) bringing some places in the periphery into its control, but neglecting others.

It is widely recognised that Arctic regions are facing 'rapid environmental and social changes' (Grimwood, 2015:380), and that this poses problems for the management of tourism activities in particular. As Maher notes, the Arctic is a region of delicate supply, yet growing demand (2015:34), and the growth of motorcycle tourism is but one expression of this. Despite its ongoing popularity, drive tourism seems to have fallen out of favour with research and destination organisations as a result of a poor image relating to the current unsustainability of

the transport form. Motor-based tourism in general is unpopular in promotion terms due to concerns with fossil fuel use. However, since most motorcycles use less fuel than the average car, there is potential here to promote motorcycle tourism as a more sustainable form of drive tourism. In addition to the safety issues described above, more difficult challenges may be faced in maintaining the finis-terre environment that all tourists to North Cape seek. However, this may also offer the solution, for motorcyclists, motorists and other visitors are all drawn to this site not only for its geographical significance but also its inviolable and ongoing attraction simply as a 'bleak, wind battered promontory' (Jacobsen, 2000:74). Undeniably the contemporary motorcyclist visitor, mostly middle aged and not so wild anymore, are able to regain some wild-ness from this periphery.

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